

Pick Your Perfect Horse

What makes a horse perfect? The perfect horse is the one that fits YOU. Pat Parelli says, “You either pick your partner or you pick your poison.” Many of us have inadvertently picked our poison by picking a horse for all the wrong reasons.

How do you pick your horse from all the wonderful horses? Just as you would pick a spouse; with the idea in mind that this was a commitment for life and you looking for a perfect fit. Ask yourself the following questions:

1) How much experience do I have with horses? This is the time to be honest. You don’t have 10 years experience if you went on a trail ride 10 years ago and again last summer. A year of experience is at least 500 hours of time spent with a horse. I have a rule of thumb that is kind of funny but actually works out quite well. The combined riding experience of horse and rider should equal 20 years. Those ole 20 year old horses out there are pure gold. They have been there and done that and can teach you a lot. If more people realized this, the prices of horses would go up with age.

2) What do I want to do with this horse? There is absolutely nothing wrong with wanting a horse to be a companion and to trail ride. In fact, 80% of riders are recreational riders; riders that just want to be safe and have a good time with their horses. But never say “just a trail horse”. A horse that is dependable on the trail is priceless and not all that common. There are many fine horses of all breeds that are perfect companion horses. Fit the horse to the job. If you are going to ride several days a week and really put on the miles, get a horse with lots of get up and go. If you prefer a quiet ride once in awhile, find a horse with a more laid back personality.

3) How much time do I have to spend with my horse? If you only have a couple of hours a week it may be better to lease or share a horse rather than leave your horse parked all week and wonder why he is a nut on a sunny Saturday afternoon.

4) Does this horse have good foundation training? You will be surprised how many horses don’t have foundation training. Foundation training is a must for safety, fun and to progress to higher levels of training. All horses should have the following at a minimum: will walk up to the human in a pasture; easy to halter and bridle – in fact the horse should lower his head so you can halter and bridle; lead politely and never crowd; stand quietly for hoof care; stand quietly for the vet including deworming and vaccinations; load and unload calmly into a trailer; stand still for saddling without being tied or cross tied; stand still for mounting from either side; will go when asked and whoa when asked. If they don’t have foundation training, do you know how to do it? If not, do you know a good, gentle, horse (wo)man to do the foundation training and are you willing to pay to have it done?

5) Am I willing/able to provide a lifetime home for this horse? Horse can live to be 30-40

+ years old. They will give you everything they have; even when it hurts. In return, you owe them a wonderful retirement. Are you prepared to care for a horse that might require special shoeing, special supplements, and additional veterinary care as he gets older? It is not fair to the horse to use them until they are injured or have special needs and then dump them. I'm sure they are "perfect for a therapy riding program" but those programs already have as many horses as they can take. Your horse will be happier staying with the people they know and love.

Horses are not ATVs with fur. They are sensitive, loving, sentient beings that form strong emotional bonds. Horse ownership is not a hobby; it is a lifestyle. Please make the commitment of horse ownership with thought and consideration.